

## ***Tenebrae: A Service of Shadows for Worship at Home***

With Easter only days away, many of our homes have Easter decorations, many of us have already taken family photographs in our Easter best, and many posts on social media are celebrating the risen Lord. While Easter is the central holiday of our faith, it can only be celebrated in its fullest when we allow ourselves to live into the dark days that precede it. That's one reason that celebrating the season of Lent and Good Friday is so important. We must allow ourselves to come face to face with the reality of death and the evil forces that are rampant in the world. More specifically, we must come to terms with our ugly fears and the deepest pain in our own existence. In doing so, we have the opportunity to see our brokenness reflected in Jesus Christ who bears our griefs and carries the sorrows of the world.

That's one reason why on each Good Friday our church has a Tenebrae service. Often called a Service of Shadows, the service marks the events of the day Jesus was crucified. A tradition that dates back to the ninth century, the service is characterized by a series of readings that tell the story of Jesus' final moments, death, and burial. After each reading, a candle is extinguished to symbolize the world growing darker, and silence is kept to help us feel the story internally.

Because we aren't gathering together on Good Friday as a congregation, we are providing you with the outline of a Tenebrae service as a resource for worship at home. The tactile experience of extinguishing candles is especially useful for engaging children, but no matter who lives at your house, the service structure can easily be adapted to fit your situation. Our prayer is that this service will be a reminder for you of the immeasurable love of Christ.

Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. (John 1:29)

### ***Preparing for Worship***

**Prepare the worship space.** Decide where in your home you will hold your service. Whether you're in your living room, kitchen, or outdoor patio, make sure that the worship space is free of distractions. Consider creating a work of art to put in your worship space. Prepare seven candles, and light them before the service begins. The candles will be extinguished one by one, following each scripture reading. If you can't find seven candles, that's okay. You can use one candle and relight it after each period of silence. Flashlights can be another substitute. Dim the lights in your worship space so that the room will grow darker as the service continues.

**Prepare the participants.** Find a way to involve everyone in your family. Talk through the service as a family, and decide in advance who will read each scripture reading, who will pray, and who will extinguish the candles. Do you live by yourself? This service will make a fine private devotion, but you might also consider inviting others to participate with you over the phone or on a video chat.

**Prepare the music.** I've suggested songs for the service below, but you may sing anything you'd like that is suitable for the occasion. You may sing without instruments, have a musician in the family accompany the songs, or sing along with videos online. If everyone in your family doesn't know the song, consider teaching it before the service begins.

**Prepare your heart.** There's no need to be formal, but approach the service with reverence and solemnity that is appropriate for the occasion.

## **The Service**

**Opening Prayer** — Begin the service with a prayer. You may offer your own prayer, or consider using the one below.

*Almighty God, as we worship you, we pray that you might receive us as your people, for whom Jesus was willing to be betrayed, and given into the hands of sinners, and suffered death upon the cross. In his name we pray. Amen.*

**Song**— See suggestions below.

**Scripture Readings** — Following each scripture reading, the reader may say, “This is the word of the Lord,” and the other(s) may respond, “Thanks be to God.” A candle is then extinguished and prolonged silence is kept (one minute or so, unless you have children with especially short attention spans).

The Shadow of Betrayal: Matthew 26:20-25

The Shadow of the Agony of the Spirit and Arrest: Matthew 26:36-50

The Shadow of Denial: Matthew 26:69-75

The Shadow of Accusation: Matthew 27:11-14, 20-29

The Shadow of Crucifixion and Humiliation: Matthew 27:31-43

The Shadow of Death: Matthew 27:45-54

The Shadow of Burial: Matthew 27:57-60

**Song** — See suggestions below.

**Closing Prayer** — Conclude the service with the prayer below or use one of your own.

*Lord Jesus Christ, son of the living God, we pray that you set your passion, cross, and death between your judgment and our souls, now and until the hour of our death. Give mercy and grace to the living; pardon and rest to the dead, and peace and unity to your church; and to us sinners everlasting life and glory, because you reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.*

## **Suggested Songs**

When I Survey the Wondrous Cross  
The Wonderful Cross (Chris Tomlin)  
Oh How He Loves You and Me  
Were You There? (excluding final stanza)  
How Deep the Father’s Love For Us (Stewart Townend)  
None But Jesus (Brooke Ligertwood)  
At the Cross (Love Ran Red) (Chris Tomlin)  
The Old Rugged Cross  
What Wondrous Love Is This (excluding final stanza)